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Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: Bush? Clinton? Next, please

Political dynasties again reach for power

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

Here comes a sentence I don't usually find myself typing: I agree with Barbara Bush on something.

Jan. 20, C-SPAN aired her installment in the series "First Ladies: Influence and Image," which was filmed at Bush's Houston home.

"Do you think there is room for another Bush in The White House?" asked host Peter Slen.

“This is a great American country, a great country, and if we can’t find more than two or three families to run for high office, that’s silly, because there are great governors and great eligible people to run,” said Bush. “I think Kennedys, Clintons, Bushes; there are just more families than that.”

The inclusion of the name Clinton was telling as another first lady, Hillary, has been conspicuously eying another presidential run. Hillary is in the midst of a tour in support of her latest book, “Hard Choices,” released June 10. Former President Bill Clinton has claimed ignorance of his wife’s intentions toward once again seeking the highest office.

“It’s a decision that only she can make and I’m not going to try to jump the gun,” he told CNN’s Anna Coren on Monday.

Though Hillary hasn’t yet declared, the former senator is widely viewed as a hard-to-beat Democratic 2016 candidate. In her interview, Barbara Bush couched her original statement, instead throwing her theoretical support behind the idea of her son, Jeb, joining his father, George H.W., and brother, George W., as chief executive.

“Although, there is no question in my mind that Jeb is the best-qualified person to run for president,” she said. “But I hope he won’t, because I think he will get all my enemies, all his brother’s, all — and there are other families. I refuse to accept that this great country isn’t raising other, wonderful people.”

While Hillary seems to be in soft campaign mode, Jeb seems more comfortable on the sidelines for now.

“As other Republicans travel the country laying the groundwork for 2016 presidential campaigns, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush is raising private-equity funds for oil and gas ventures,” Bloomberg’s Miles Weiss and Mark Silva reported Thursday.

One heir to the political throne who isn’t currently shy about campaigning is Jeb’s son, George Prescott Bush. This fresh prince of American sovereigns is now running for commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. Not that the particular office title in question appears to matter much to George P. Nov. 9, the Associated Press reported he filed paperwork required to run for office long before specifying which one. March 4, his quest to be elected to seemingly any statewide office came one step closer to fruition as he won his Republican primary.

“There was no incumbent running and Bush used his American political-royalty surname to raise more than $3.5 million while his opponent, East Texas businessman David Watts, could barely afford to travel the state,” reported AP’s Will Weissert and Jamie Stengle. “Bush immediately becomes the overwhelming favorite in November against Democratic nominee and former El Paso Mayor John Cook.”

I am 31 years old. For 20 of those years — nearly two-thirds — the surname of the head of state has been either Bush or Clinton. During those remaining 11 years, five of those included H.W. Bush as vice president to President Ronald Reagan, and another four saw Hillary as secretary of state. In fact, only the 537 days in which John Kerry succeeded Clinton at the state department have featured an executive branch bereft of a Bush or Clinton in my lifetime.

I can only conclude impulse for dynastic rule hearkens back to our country's English roots. Remnants of constitutional monarchy still remain in the American bloodstream and this yet another symptom. A glance at even a simple list of all the politicians at every level of government throughout this country's history related by blood or marriage should quickly confirm this fact. The electorate must want it this way.

But, seriously, there have to be other families, right?

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